

## The power of the virtual Mass

Oh, how perceptions change!

My family and I – as many others did – attended Mass weekly virtually throughout the stay at home (or at least the cannot-go-to-physical-church) order. At the outset of this new “on-line” Mass, all that I could think of, with dread I might add, was the old TV Masses of old. The sound and picture quality were always terrible, the priest’s homily was always awful, and half the time the action was taking place off camera. Ugh! With that as the backdrop, a few stories....

We sought out different on-line Masses to attend and Bellarmine Chapel at Xavier University became our go to. The technology, the sound and picture quality, and the superimposition of the readings on the bottom of the screen were best in class. And the homilies matched that in being best in class. Fr. Eric Sundrup, SJ was humble and insightful, making one of the worst situations in recent history a wee bit more bearable. We looked forward to each Mass. Finding that Mass that clicked for you may have been your experience as well.

I am sure that there were times for you that the technology failed, and you were forced to seek out Mass elsewhere. We did that, too. And to my amazement, God’s hand was in this, too. There are two instances that this happened, and the result was clearly divinely inspired.

The first occurred when I sought out a Mass at Fairfield University’s Egan Chapel. This University in my hometown in Connecticut is on the campus of Fairfield College Prep, my Jesuit all-male high school (think St. Xavier High School but on the Connecticut coast) and is where my wife, Jennifer, attended college and where we got married back in 1993. There is a lot of history here. As I tuned in, I did not recognize the celebrant but to my amazement (why am I always amazed at God’s plan?!) he announced that the homily would be delivered by Fr. Charlie Allen, SJ. He is a family friend and was the principal of my prep school many years ago. We see him every Easter when we are back East for the holiday. But, due to the pandemic, had not seen him in over a year. He is an amazing homilist, historian, and storyteller. This was his last Mass before being missioned to a retirement community in Massachusetts. I tuned into this Mass on arguably the last time I may see and hear Fr. Allen. A divine gift indeed!

The other experience was when we turned into St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City where I used to often attend daily Mass when I worked there. The celebrant was one of the monsignors assigned to the cathedral and he was preaching about St. Francis of Assisi. His homily was so memorable because as he talked about Francis’s successful textile merchant father and Francis’s renunciation of all the trappings of that lifestyle, he slowly removed his chasuble, stole, cincture, and alb. He finished his homily in his clerics ... partially mimicking Francis’s stripping of his garments and his embrace of Christ-like poverty. What a memorable homily!

My perception of the virtual Mass has certainly changed. It has been a year of being able to focus more intently during Mass (with minimal interruptions at home), being able to hear a variety of homilies that really spoke to me, and to worship with others in various parts of the country – all dealing with and experiencing the pandemic differently. The power of God’s guiding hand was very clear through it all.